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## **PARENTS ARE THE KEY**

One of the data points for Alaska's Infant Learning Program that is most distressing is the number of families that are 'lost to follow-up.' Providers report that some families are difficult to engage. They cancel visits, don't show up for appointments, don't participate during home visits or don't follow through with intervention activities. When we ask program's to identify parents for leadership roles we hear that parents are too busy, or overwhelmed by the needs of their child. In the meantime, more than half of families referred for services from ILP are lost to follow-up. A recent article from the National Academy of State Health Policy Identifies three important levels of parent engagement; Engaging parents in accessing services for their children, Engaging parents in shaping the services their child receives, and engaging parents in shaping systems and policies (Rosenthal & Ashan, 2010).

From the very first contact with families we set the tone for home visits. Providers who are successful at engaging families see their role as coach, consultant or facilitators rather than

providers of direct service to the child. A 2014 study by Carl Dunst indicates the following concerns about early intervention:

- The majority of parents are not involved in their children's early intervention
- When parents are involved, it's not in ways that build their capacity to promote their child's learning.

Providers who are most effective see parents as equal partners in service delivery, and make their focus to support parent competence and confidence. This means that it is as important for providers to be trained in adult learning principles as it is to understand effective interventions with young children. Effective providers take a 'capacity building' approach in their work with families. Bottom line is; if parents aren't full partners in services, children are exponentially less likely to make progress.

Capacity Building Models	Traditional Models
Promotion	vs. Treatment
Empowerment	vs. Expertise
Strength-based	vs. Deficit-based
Resource-based	vs. Service-based
Family-centered	vs. Professionally-centered

(Dunst, 2014)

The irony of this situation is that parents are the key to finding solutions to our concerns about parent engagement. Organizations can promote parent leadership by inviting them to be board members, participate on interview teams for potential employees, asking for their input as a part of provider performance reviews, and creating a climate where parent feedback is embraced.

Those of us here at the State office are not blameless. We can support systemic change that includes parents in meaningful ways - beyond the annual parent survey. During a recent conversation with a parent advocate from another state regarding challenges with our IFSP form I was told "If you had parents on your committee you wouldn't have ended up with a thirty-five page form." Parents are the key.

### **DEMONSTRATE FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AND CONTRIBUTION:**

- Develop a plan for identifying a diverse, representative group of families to participate.
- During and after meetings, specifically recognize the value of the family's participation.
- Recognize individual family strengths while respecting the different methods of coping and adjustment.
- Demonstrate how Federal programs support families to attend national conferences.

### **PROVIDE FAMILY IDENTIFIED SUPPORTS TO ASSIST THE FAMILY'S PARTICIPATION:**

- Provide convenient meeting times and locations for family members.

- Compensate families for their time, expertise, and expenses.
- Clearly identify a staff person to be the primary contact person for reimbursement and other issues. Be Sure she/he understand that timely reimbursement and contacts are essential.
- Develop provisions that ensure that parents are present to participate in policy related activities including direct staff support, stipends, travel expenses, and childcare.
- Identify these supports in RFPs, grants, and policy.
- Match veteran parents with inexperienced family members to ensure that new members feel supported in their roles as advisors and have the opportunity to share their ideas.
- Consider incorporating a "family leave" policy so family members can choose an inactive role but maintain their membership should family circumstances require some time off.
- Recognize that some family members may require more and different kinds of support than other to participate in a meaningful way.
- Encourage and facilitate family-to-family support and networking.

### **PROVIDE FORMAL ORIENTATION FOR FAMILIES AND PROVIDE INFORMATION FOR INVOLVING THEM:**

- Provide orientation to both family members and staff about the issues, participants, and process.
- Provide informational support for parents to be prepared to participate as equal partners on a "level playing field" with their professional counterparts.
- Provide technical assistance, leadership mentoring, training, and other parent leadership teaming.

PACER Center, Inc. 2004 | Building Program Capacity to Serve Youth with Disabilities Session #5: Family, Culture & Disability  
PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

*Laurie Thomas, M.Ed*  
*State EI/ILP Manager*

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## **STUMP the STATE**

### *Your Questions and Answers*

If you have questions for the next newsletter, please send a quick email to Laurie L using the link below.



*Questions for this column are considered and responded to through a review of statute, regulation and policy and other supporting documents and vetted by the State team through a consensus process.*

Please submit questions for "Stump the State" to:

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## DIGG'N DATA

### NEW: Local School District Notification



#### The Latest Update

After approximately 7 years, Alaska has slipped to National status of 'Needs Assistance'. This is due in part, to our discrepancies between EI/ILP (Part C) and Preschool Special Education (Part B) notification data. As a result we were required to develop a statewide improvement plan. Here is a brief overview to the requirements and our plan which requires a new system at the local level for distributing and documenting your local school district notifications. Please feel free to contact your TA with questions.

#### What is notification?

Notification is the process of sending child contact information to local school districts and State, Special Education office as a referral to Part B services, at least 90 days prior to the child's third birthday. Part C Sec. 637(a)(9) The notification information is: School district where the child resides, child last name, middle name, first name, date of birth, primary contact (parent/guardian) name, address and phone. [idea.ed.gov](http://idea.ed.gov) [Description](#)

#### Why do we do notification?

It is our responsibility to send contact information of enrolled Part C children, turning 3 years of age, to the local school districts and State Department of Education, Special Education. This is a shared childfind activity, required by Federal IDEA law [20U.S.C. § 1403.209\(b\)](#). This

information enables Preschool Special Education (Part B) to plan for timely eligibility determination. IEPs are required to be developed and implemented by age 3 for preschool special education eligible children. Part B Sec. 612 (a)(9) [idea.ed.gov Transition](https://idea.ed.gov/Transition)

## Who does notification?

In Alaska all Part C children are considered potentially eligible for Part B and must have notification sent by:

1. local ILP agency to the local school and
2. the State EI/ILP office to the Department of Education and Early Development, Special Education (EED).

## When is notification done?

Alaska ILP Database sends an automated report to EED every week via a secure, password protected email link. This report contains contact information for all Part C children turning 27 months of age in that week, unless the family has opted out of notification. Local ILP agencies send this information to their local school districts at the time of the 90-Day Transition Conference Invitation (no later than 90 days prior to child's 3rd birthday).

## Here's the New Part

The important change to this process is that you have written verification from the school district that they received your notification. Feel free to contact the state office with questions.

## How to do notification:

**Step 1** - Ensure that all database contact information is current:

- On the child screen: child name, gender, DOB, primary contact, primary contact address and phone, and school district
- On the staff table: the child's ILP family service coordinator name, phone and or email

**Step 2** - As the child reaches 27 months of age:

- Go into the child record
- Click on 'Reports' then, LEA Notification Letter or LEA Notification Letter - Late (if the child was referred to ILP after age 27 months)
- Print out Letter
  - In order to automate the letter, you will need to know the child ILP database id number, the date of your 90-day transition conference meeting if known, otherwise TBA, the meeting address, the school district contact (addressee) and meeting time.
  - The letter will also ask you if the family declined the conference.
- Send letter in a secure method with receipt received

**Step 3** - File the notification letter and verification that the local school district received it in the

child file.

**Note:** You may have routine meeting with your school district staff in which you present a list of children ready for transition, if this is the case, discuss a modification to the above steps with your State TA. Submit a request to the State Part C Coordinator for a variation to the Notification protocol with an explanation of your process and example of your, forms and verification of receipt. An EED Notification report is also available for your notification process in the ILP database under reports.

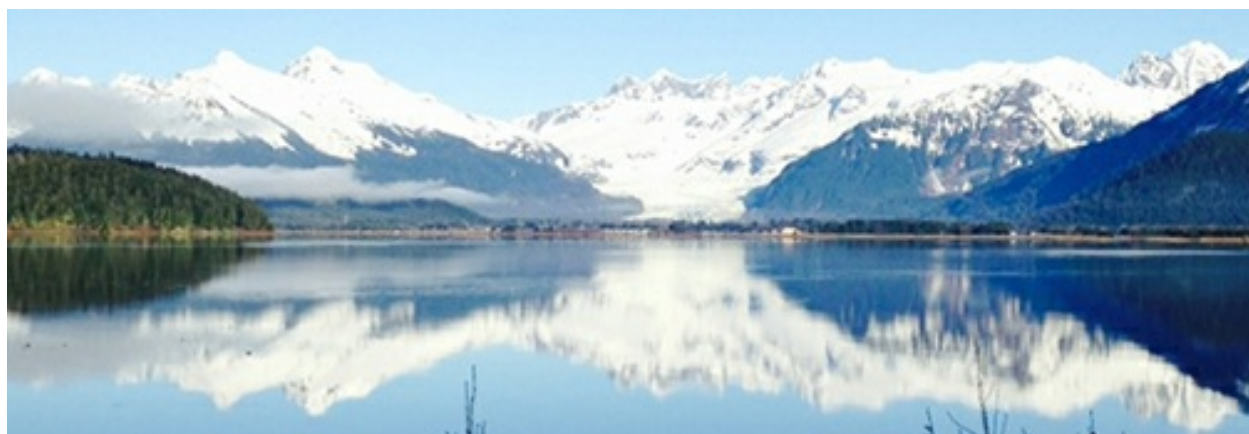
*Additional Resources:*

Transition Timeline: [Timeline Flowchart](#)

Late Referrals to Part C: [Late Referrals](#)

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## REACH Southeast Alaska



REACH Inc. has been providing home and community based services to children and adults experiencing developmental disabilities since 1978 - over 36 years. REACH started as an agency serving approximately a dozen individuals and their families. We have grown to serve over 400 people a year through the diverse programs. The Infant Learning Program became a part of REACH Inc. in 1987. We currently have 77 children and families enrolled in our program.

When needed, REACH ILP serves infants, toddlers, and their families in Juneau, Haines, Klukwan, Skagway, Gustavus, Hoonah, Pelican, Tenakee Springs, Petersburg, and Wrangell. Our communities are home to individuals from diverse backgrounds: Tlingit, Haida, Hispanic, Filipino, Tongan, and the lower 48. Fishing, tourism, state and federal government, and educa



tion are the prominent industries in our area. The Juneau community hosts the Sealaska Heritage Institute's Celebration, a bi-annual dance and culture festival; the annual Alaska Folk Festival, and the annual Public Market that brings in folks from surrounding communities. But for Haines, Klukwan, and Skagway, all other communities are accessible only by ferry, boat or airplane.



There is strong collaboration throughout the early childhood community in this part of Southeast, especially as the community of Juneau works on increasing the availability of childcare and decreasing housing costs for families. REACH ILP is active with the Partnership for Families and Children and nurtures strong relationships with Parents As Teachers, Tlingit and Haida Head Start, Bartlett Beginnings, and our local school districts.

REACH ILP has a satellite office in Petersburg, where Eliza Warmack, M. Ed. provides services to that community and its sister community, Wrangell. The rest of our communities are served by staff based in Juneau: Bev Ingram, OTR/L; Heidi Johnson, CCC-SLP; Jackie Bell, MS ECSE; Julie Peters, CCC-SLP; Kathleen Hansen, OTR/L; and Kristen Spencer, MS ECSE. Our staff is supported by program assistant Crystal Clark, who is also based in Juneau. We are fortunate to have an infant mental health counselor, early intervention-trained SLP, and early intervention-trained PT to contract with. We are a well-trained and experienced staff that provides individualized services to families with the family-child relationship as the foundation for development.

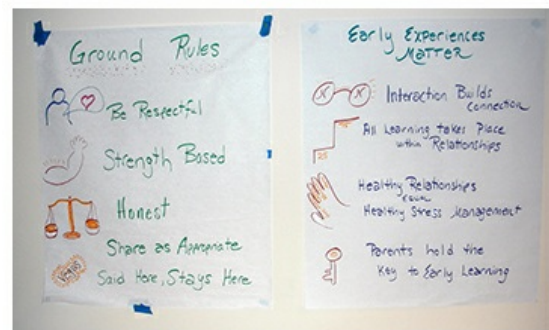
We strive to achieve and maintain a trans-disciplinary approach to providing services to our families. And we thoughtfully cultivate a collaborative team environment. Our team is currently focusing on implementing reflective practice into our team culture, increasing our ability to connect with vulnerable families involved in the CPS system, increasing our use of technology to increase our efficiency with documentation, and improving our billing system.



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## FIT Court Team Update

Lots of good things have been happening with the Family Infant Toddler Court Team (FIT Court Team), and we're very excited to share them with you! The FIT Court Team is a pilot project through the Early Learning Program at Community Connections, in Ketchikan. We modeled the program after the Zero to Three Organization's Safe Babies Court Team, and we still receive some support through this organization. The FIT Court Team works to increase awareness among all those who work with maltreated infants and toddlers about the negative impact of abuse and neglect on very young children and change local systems to improve outcomes and prevent future court involvement in the lives of very young children. We operate under the judicial leadership of Judge Stephens and Judge Carey. They hold monthly status hearings to help keep families moving forward. Attorneys, GALs, ICWA social workers, OCS social workers and other service providers participate in the hearings and in monthly Family Team Meetings.



The Family Team Meetings are designed to keep families moving towards reunification, while also considering concurrent planning to help the child's "first placement be the last placement". We have been in operation for about a year now and we have



served a total of six families, one of whom has graduated successfully. This family has completed the Trial Home Visit and the child is now back home with her parents. The other five families are still actively engaged in the program. We have also started a waiting list, because the families who qualify for and who are interested in this program are more than a part-time Court Team Coordinator can reasonably serve.

One major component of this program is frequent and meaningful visits. In partnership with our local Public Health nurses, we have just completed our first Visit Coaching training. Roseann Lynch, a local family therapist who specializes in working with families with children under the age of three years old, offered to present an overview of Infant Mental Health that would help the potential coaches understand how exposure to trauma impacts young children and how this can affect attachment. This training was followed by a presentation on "Visit Coaching" and discussed ways that Coaches can support families before, after, and during each visit with their child. Most of this training was based on the Guided Interaction for Family Time or GIFT Program, also created by Zero to Three.





Providing children and families with family centered infant mental health services is another major part of this program. Many of our local therapists are working to obtain more training in Infant Mental Health practices and are becoming more involved with the FIT Court Team, overall.

We have also come to realize that in many cases, foster families need as much support as biological parents, and this support is critical if we hope to make "the first placement the last". We have reached out to foster parents and are hoping to provide more meaningful support. We are also much more thoughtful in our approach to including foster parents in the Family Team Meetings.

Other improvements to our program are more subtle, yet in some cases, are just as powerful. All Family Team Meetings are now held at the Community Connections office building. The Family Team Meeting notes are organized more efficiently and can now be distributed to all team members via confidential email. We have also embedded the Strengthening Families protective factors into each meeting and try to link the family's strengths and areas for support to the five protective factors. We want families to realize that they are not defined by the risks they face; they are defined by the strengths they demonstrate along the way. Sometimes, the most significant part of a Family Team Meeting is when a parent recognizes the meaningful change that has occurred in her life.



The magic of this program is found in the concept of synergy.  $1+1=3$ . As a team committed to a child, we can accomplish much more than any one of us could working alone. This is the message we hope to share with families: You are not alone; you live in a community that supports you.

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## **SPROUT Family Services Seeks Developmental Specialist**

**Be a member of a passionate and knowledgeable multidisciplinary team!**

Join us in helping to provide early intervention services to families with infants and toddlers living with a delay in development or who are at risk for delay(s) living in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. Travel to various communities on at least a monthly basis.



Plan and implement Family Service Coordination and Specialized Instruction/Developmental Therapy to promote the family and communities' capacity to care for their child and promote growth and development in natural environments where families live, work and play. Bring expertise the team in the area of child development.

Part time position (60 hours per month). Paid training and transportation. Retirement after 3 years. This is a telecommuting & travel-based position. Salary DOE.

**To apply:** Please send resume and cover letter to [office@sproutalaska.org](mailto:office@sproutalaska.org) and go to [sproutalaska.org](http://sproutalaska.org) to complete our online application. Preferred start date September 4, 2015. Position open until filled.



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"Good actions give strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others." - Plato

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